

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 CANBER 06225 230705Z

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4128

S E C R E T CANBERRA 6225

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AS

SUBJECT: CONDUCT OF AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY

REF: STATE 208502

1. PRIMIN WHITLAM IS SCHEDULED TO DEPART AUSTRALIA FOR NEW YORK AT NOON SEPTEMBER 27 (SYDNEY TIME) AND RETURN TO AUSTRALIA ON OCTOBER 13. DURING HIS ABSENCE DEPUTY PRIMIN CAIRNS WILL BE ACTING PRIMIN FROM SEPT. 27 TO OCT 3, WHEN CAIRNS WILL LEAVE ON TRIP TO CHINA. FROM OCT. 3 TO OCT 13, ACTING PRIMIN WILL BE MINISTER FOR MINERALS AND ENERGY R.F.X. CONNOR.

2. IN TERMS OF DAY-TO-DAY CONDUCT OF FIREIGN POLICY, OFFICE OF MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS WILLESSE (WHO IS ON TRIP TO U.S. AND WILL RETURN OCT. 13, SEPARATELY FROM WHITLAM) TELLS US THAT ACTING MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS WILL BE SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE LIONEL BOWEN. WILLESEE WILL BE REPRESENTED IN SENATE BY SENATOR LIONEL MURPHY.

3. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS IN PARA 2 OF REFTEL, OUR VIEWS AS FOLLOWS:

A) CAIRNS GIVES EVERY INDICATION OF IMMERSION IN ECONOMIC ISSUES, WHICH CONTINUE TO DOMINATE MEDIA. HE HAS GIVEN NO SIGN OF RENEWED INTEREST IN FOREIGN POLICY.

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PAGE 02 CANBER 06225 230705Z

I AM DINING WITH CAIRNS AT MY HOUSE SEPTEMBER 26 AND

WILL TAKE FURTHER READING AT THAT TIME.

B) AS NOTED ABOVE, CAIRNS WILL BE ACTING PRIMIN ONLY FROM SEPT. 27 TO OCT. 3. BASED ON HIS CONDUCT DURING WHITLAM'S ABSENCE IN INDONESIA SEPT. 5-8 (WHEN CAIRNS WAS ACTING PRIMIN) I DO NOT RPT NOT ANTICIPATE HE WILL ACT IN MANNER HARMFUL TO U.S. INTERESTS. ANY ISSUES IN THE FOREIGN POLICY FIELD OF PARTICULAR DIFFICULTY AND SENSITIVITY ARE ALMOST CERTAIN TO BE REFERRED TO WHITLAM WHEREVER HE MAY BE OR LEFT FOR HIS DECISION UPON HIS RETURN TO AUSTRALIA.

C) AS NOTED IN A), CAIRNS AS ACTING PRIMIN SHOWED NO PARTICULAR INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS DURING HIS PREVIOUS BRIEF TERM AS ACTING PRIMIN. WHEN BARNARD WAS ACTING PRIMIN, HIS CONCURRENT CABINET ROLE OF DEFENSE MINISTER NECESSARILY INVOLVED HIS FULL ATTENTION TO SECURITY MATTERS WHICH RELATED AT TIMES TO INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES. UNLIKE BARNARD, CAIRNS HAS A CABINET ROLE TODAY WHICH DOES NOT RELATE TO SECURITY AFFAIRS OR TO INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES BUT RATHER CONCENTRATES ON THE ECONOMIC FIELD WHERE CAIRNS HAS TAKEN A FAR MORE PROMINENT ROLE THAN BARNARD EVER DID.

GREEN

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NNN

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